8th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, DEC. 3, 1976 NUMBER 406

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1 CENT PAY NO MORE

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A WEEKLY REVIEW OF THE ARTS

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

THE BIG SCREEN: I was quite anxious to see The Shootist when it opened here. After all, Variety's man in the movies deemed it "one of the great films of our time," and coming from a tough sheet like Variety that ain't mere feed and grain.

It opened on a Wednesday in the neighborhood and I was there for the first showing. Since the film's now history, there's not much point in a review. However, just to keep matters tidy, it wasn't exactly one of the great films of our time, or this year, or even the past few months. Pretty good, about files it. John Wayne is fine, and there are fairly decent jobs by Lauren Bacall and Hugh O'Brian. There are also a couple of fairly awful performances from Harry Morgan and Richard Boone, both of whom should know better. Generally, the novel was superior--the downbeat ending has been altered and softened for the screen, reportedly at Wayne's suggestion, and this changes the whole idea of the story, not for the better. Anyway, Wayne's way above the content, so they'd do well to polish up another Oscar at the Academy. End of critique.

What's on my mind, for purposes of this corner, is that The Shootist didn't seem to do too well in the way of business, at least not around here. When you have John Wayne in a flick that's hailed in advance as one of the great ones, you'd expect the resulting stampede to flatten the doors to the auditorium, especially at a time when theatres are shuttering regularly from creeping paralysis of product. True, I neglected to check the national grosses on the film, so it might be a local malady. But something tells me that the returns have been disappointing overall.

Maybe this situation opening day might hold some clues as to why. The Shootist opened in one side of a twin-cinema setup. Theatre #2 was in its second week of Ode To Billy Joe, inspired by the Bobbie Gentry song, a rustic drama about a teenage lad unable to fulfill his love because he had been groped in a previous reel by one of his own gender, the trauma eventually causing him to do a Brodie off that bridge. No names to speak of, coupled with unpromising newspaper and television reviews when it opened. In its second week, Ode To Billy Joe was packed to the exit signs that day. On the other side of the wall, The Shootist opened to a house about one-quarter full. Interestingly, the audience contained few patrons under 40--there was one kid sitting in the second row, but his mother came and got him before the film ended.

Remember how we used to go see John Wayne, lining up for one of his Three Mesquiteers Westerns, or The Fighting Seabees, or Sands Of Iwo Jima? Or Red River, or Rio Bravo? Doesn't work that way anymore, now that he's playing a cancer-ridden old gunfighter. Today, they pass up ol' Duke and flock to see something about a kid who suicides on acount of he'd been buggared. O tempora. O mores!

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DON HUTCHISON

The November issue of The West Coast Review of Books contains information on new and forthcoming books, some of which would make great stocking stuffers. Titles which interested me included THE GROUCHO/PHILE by Groucho Marx (Bobbs-Merrill); TUNE IN YESTERDAY: THE ULTIMATE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OLD TIME RADIO (Prentice-Hall) by John Dunning; THE ADVENTURES OF CONAN DOYLE by Charles Higham the movie buff moving into a new field (W. W. Norton); HOLLYWOOD DIRECTORS 1914-1940 edited by Richard Kosarski; WHO WAS THAT MASKED MAN? THE STORY OF THE LONE RANGER by David Rothel (A. S. Barnes); THE DAY THE LAUGHTER STOPPED, the true and supposedly vindicating story of Fatty Arbuckle, by David Yallop (St. Martin's Press); WALT DISNEY, THE MAGIC OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES (Simon & Schuster) by Bob Thomas whose biographies of Harry Cohn and Walter Winchell were remarkable because of their depth of research and non-adulatory qualities; JULES VERNE (Taplinger), a new biography by Jean Jules-Verne, the grandson of "the father of science fiction"; AIRSHIPS, an illustrated history by Henry Beaubois; HEARTLAND by Mort Sahl; and, last but hardly least, BASIL RATHBONE IS SHERLOCK HOLMES and THE MOVIE SERIAL BOOK, both from Drake Publishers.

Two new books which sound particularly worthwhile are AFTERNOONS IN MID-SUMMER by Erskine Caldwell and HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID by James R. Silke. The Caldwell book, by the author of God's Little Acre and Tobacco Road, is a non-fiction look into the rural towns wherein Caldwell wrote his greatest novels; let's hope it indicates a revival of interest in Caldwell's work.

The James R. Silke book, according to the review, sounds as if it may be one of the best things ever written about the movies. Silke was an employee of Warner Brothers in Burbank and he has written a book which attempts to capture the special magic of those times, the big studio era. According to The West Coast Review, the quality of Silke's writing lifts HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID light years above most of the junk books which populate the shelves.

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Thanks to David Lennick, Golden Age radio still thrives on CKQS. Some of this month's highlights are:

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE Dec. 5 at 9:30.
POPEYE THE SAILOR; TERRY AND THE PIRATES Dec. 9 at 9 p. m.
BURNS & ALLEN Dec. 13 at 9.
BIG TOWN (with Edward G. Robinson) Dec. 16 at 9.
TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES; MR. FIRST NIGHTER Dec. 17 at 8.
CHARLIE CHAN Dec. 19 at 9:30.
THE AMOS & ANDY CHRISTMAS PROGRAM Dec. 23 at 9.
GANGBUSTERS Dec. 26 at 9:30.
MAE WEST...on records, screen and radio Dec. 28 at 9.
MYSTERIOUS TRAVELLER ("New Year's Nightmare") Dec. 30 at 9.

PETE HARRIS

SERIAL MADNESS: At one point, during last Tuesday's orgy of cliffhanger serial chapters at the New Yorker theatre, I found myself in a serious conversation with Don Daynard and Bill Black about the sequence in chapter 10 of The Crimson Ghost (which we were watching at that point) in which the truck driven by Linda Stirling goes crashing through the warehouse doors and plunges into the water below. In the low-angle shot showing the truck bursting through the doors, the back wheels fall off, but in the follow-up shot from above, the back wheels are properly in place. At any rate, that's what this conversation was about. And, it occurred to me later that if anything could demonstrate the hold that cliffhanger serials have on us, that conversation would do until something better came along. Or, it could just mean that we we're all absolutely bonkers.

I must say, though, that our entire contingent--Don Hutchison, Wally Seeley, Don Daynard, Bill Black and myself (sorry Parky Parkhurst couldn't be there)--thoroughly enjoyed the whole evening. But, I also must say that there was much unseemly laughter during some of the Columbia entries which included the '49 Batman and Captain Video, the absolute low point of which came when a flying saucer done as a superimposed animated cartoon rather than as a miniature made its appearance. Actually, it's stock footage from Columbia's Bruce Gentry, but in any event, it's an abysmal cop-out. Gene Roth's get-up as the evil Vultura in Captain Video also was good for a few guffaws. (Any fool know there was only one Vultura, anyway--Lorna Gray in Perils Of Nyoka.)

The evening was more than redeemed by such Republic entries as Captain Marvel, Spy Smasher, The Crimson Ghost, Captain America, Haunted Harbor (under its reissue title Pirates Harbor), Jungle Girl (with the great sliding floor cliffhanger), Zorro's Fighting Legion, The Mysterious Dr. Satan, Daughter of Don Q and Tiger Woman. The evening also included a chapter from The Clutching Hand (Stage and Screen, 1936) with Jack Mulhall as Craig Kennedy and The Miracle Rider (Mascot, 1935) with Tom Mix, but as far as our group was concerned, it was Republic all the way.

Thanks to the New Yorker's Gary Topp for bringing back a thousand and one Saturday matinees. It was a great night for serial fans!

* * *

PICTURES THAT TALK!!: There's another interesting evening scheduled at the Ontario Science Centre on Thursday, Dec. 9, at 7 p.m. when the Ontario Film Theatre will mark the 50th anniversary of Vitaphone by showing the original program first presented at New York's Warner Theatre Aug. 6, 1926. The films feature such people as Will Hays, violinist Mischa Elman, guitarist Roy Smeck and violinist Efrem Zimbalist and the feature movie is director Alan Crosland's Don Juan with John Barrymore, Mary Astor and Estelle Taylor.